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AUTHOR	Prime, Eugenie
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ABSTRACT

This address focuses on technological change, the Information Age, and the relevance of libraries. Highlights include: creating a shared vision; adding value to information services; sharing organizational values; forging strategic alliances with vendors and suppliers; reallocating resources; and responding to change with flexibility. The speech argues that information managers must be bold in their decisions about the future of technology. It suggests that librarians should devote more of their time to consult outside of the library, and that librarians should reconsider the physical structures of their libraries. (MES)

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Every Time I Figure Out Where it's at, Somebody Moves It!

By Eugenie Prime

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EVERY TIME I FIGURE OUT WHERE IT'S AT, SOMEBODY MOVES IT!

Eugenie Prime
(Manager: Corporate Libraries, Hewlett-Packard)

It is wonderful to be back in South Africa. It's getting to be one of my favorite destinations. And it is always good to be among my fellow professionals. Actually, yesterday a few people asked me, Which university are your from? So, you may well ask what is a nice, innocent corporate librarian doing in a place like this, with hundreds of politically savvy, sophisticated university librarians. Well, let me tell you. There is really much more that unites us in common concern than divides us in mission of focus. I would like to spend a time this afternoon talking about a situational content and probably why we got where we are and to make some suggestions of how we can get ourselves out of there. You know, we are living in incredible times, -incredible times of change. We are living in a time that John Handy in his book "Age of Unreason" describes as discontinuous change, where he says the only thing that is predictable is that nothing is predictable. We are living in age that having created Moore's law, promulgated in 1965, thirty three years ago we are now turning around and threatening to defy Moore's law. Now Moore's law predicted a linear extrapolation of double density chips every eighteen months, and in 1997 processor speed, storage capacity and transmission rates involved at an annual rate of 60%. In the last decade things have been improved a 100 times.

Yes, this is an age in which the computer in a watch on your hand and the computer games your grand kids play, have more power than the first IBM 360. So it is an age that is not only terrifying in the kind of change and the nature change but dizzying in the speed of change. One person said that the factory of the future will have two employees a man and a dog. The man would be there to feed the dog and the dog would be there to keep the man from touching the equipment. Microsoft in a first page ad in Business Week just a week ago asked this question "Are you living under the threat of change, or are you living in hope of it?" This change is also an all enveloping change. It is an change that affects how we work, play, entertain ourselves and educate ourselves. It is a change that affects how we interact with each other. We live in an information age where most new products are old products that have been informated. In this book 20/20 Vision, the author Stan Davis talks about a Japanese manufacturer Toto Ltd who sells a paperless toilet, that sprays warm water, blows warm air to dry and even dispenses scent. More than that, the machine keeps the seat warm in winter and automatically sanitizes the bowl after each use. New models analysis urine, measure body temperature, weight, blood pressure and pulse. Now you can imagine anybody who is a hypochondriac having a wonderful time. It would be a hard to get them out of the restroom. In short, and I quote Davis, "Today information based enhancement have become the main avenue to revitalized mature businesses and to transform them into new ones". We also living in a economy that has been called the information economy. An age where information is perceived as the new capital, perceived as the engine that generates wealth. Words such as Intellectual capital, and Knowledge Management are becoming as common in the corporate arena as Return on Investment. An economy where people are wrestling with how to measure these knew intangibles. We are recognizing the truth of a statement of ... Einstein ... in a truth that we all as librarians resonate with. Einstein said "Not everything that can be counted, counts and that not everything that counts can be counted". Every year at budget time when we need to justify the need for dollars for collection development because of increases in the cost of serials of electronic texts the need for more staff and additional equipment and more meaningful space and the powers that be want justification in simple dollars and cents or in raw numbers, thank you. We often wish for the wisdom of Einstein. Well here it is, distilled and crystallized not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts. But we keep looking for that magic formula the silver bullet algorithm that will put us just in the place to always guarantee us the sufficient funds that we need. And I am here to tell you that that does not work. I have been there, done that. Because the day the it works, the day after, somebody will change the rules.

What has and continues to intrigue me most, is that in the age of information where we talk about a

knowledge creating company, where we talk about a new organizational wealth as knowledge or information. What intrigues me most, is that this wealth has seemed to bypass our institutions that - is libraries, and eludes us as information professionals, that is librarians. I am yet to see the librarian, that has struck gold and made it rich. I am yet to see the Bill Gates of our profession. And all reason and logic and good sense seem to say this should not be so. What has happened instead, in this age of information and information economy, we the natural heirs, we the natural heirs are here at this conference, with this theme of the challenge of relevance for the 21st century. What is wrong with this picture?

Let me say unequivocally that I do have a lot of respect for the planners of the conference programme and for the theme chosen. Despite the abstract that does appear in print and I did write it I confess, the issue of irrelevancy, the fear of irrelevancy, the fear of becoming beside the point, the concern about being discounted and marginalized, the fear of being considered extraneous, is a valid one and one that does need to be addressed. And this is perhaps as good a place as any which to engaged in such a discussion. If not here among professionals then where? After all we are told that if ten years from now our business remains the same as today we would very likely be out of business. Having said that, let me restate a point that I made in my abstract, and let me restated as unequivocally and as bluntly, and that point is this that the answer to our concern with relevancy is not to be found in seeking after relevancy. Relevancy you see can not be the goal of target, relevancy can only be a by product. Let me repeat that, relevancy can not be the target, it can only be and it must be a by product. When we claim that we want to be relevant, what do we mean? Relevant to whom and relevant to what? Relevant to faculty, students, or both? Relevant in the minds and perceptions of our economic buyers, rectors, chancellors, provosts, presidents? Relevant to our vendors and suppliers? And relevant for what? For what we have always been? To do what we have always done? And who determines our relevance? We, are the organization or people for whom we wish to be relevant? Relevance you see is relative.

The other issue is, that in order to be relevant, if that were truly possible as an end state, we would always have to be testing the pulse, checking the temperature, reading the vital signs and then setting a course of action guaranteed to get us there we hope. But once we get there, we will only find that there is no longer any there, there, because you see, every time you figure out where it's at, somebody moves it. Our environments are too volatile. Change too discontinuous. Expectations too fragile, technological breakthroughs too unpredictable for us to keep checking on vital signs as a precursor to action. The late Will Rogers the well known American cowboy -humorist speaking in the 1930's, said this "it is not sufficient that you be on the right track, if you are not moving fast enough, you will be run over." The trouble is, there is a mischievous engineer called Change, who keeps switching the tracks capriciously or so it seems. He has a devilish sense of humor.

Think about this for a moment, twenty years ago, 15 years ago, 10 years ago irrelevancy was not an issue a matter of fact, as a medical librarian and as an corporate librarian, I envied academic librarians. You guys seemed to have it made. I mean everybody understood that universities could not exist without a libraries, and you were a part of the accreditation process. So, if the library is the heart of the organization, the heart of the organism, how can you get rid of the heart without getting rid of the organism. So it seemed to me you had it made. So can you imagine my shock when you are talking about relevancy. So what has happened in the last 5 years or so to bring about this issue. Well a number of things for starters;- Disintermediation, Ceding of professional territory, seduction of technology and the internet, the demystifying of our jobs. This list is not supposed to be all inclusive. I am just mentioning some of these things. Disintermediation. When people wanted information they came to us the information specialists. Now they specialize in finding the information themselves. They have even coined the word for it, it is called disintermediation. And that is for us a dirty, four letter word, because we were and are considered intermediaries. Now they not only say that we are irrelevant and unnecessary. They say that we are barriers to access. Now we may dispute that, but the issue is not whether that is true of not. The issue is and the fact is, that they believe it. They think that they can do it them selves, faster, better, cheaper. Think of the old information delivery system, and think of it in terms of a manufacturing process, think of the supply chain management. In the supply chain, the pay off takes place only at the end of the chain. In our terms that is when the information is received or delivered in a form that the user can use or, in a form that is actionable. Supply chain optimization argues, that at every

stage, one wants to guarantee the minimum amount of redundancy, eliminate any unnecessary form of interaction, that might impede the information flow or lengthen the cycle time from production to consumption. The idea, is that the information must be there just in time not just incase, not one moment before, not one moment after. Unfortunately we are often perceived as impeding that smooth flow, not only by the users but often times by the suppliers themselves who now have the technology to deliver the information directly to our clientele. Just think of the computer manufacturer "Dell" and how Michael Dell transformed the sale of computers by allowing the customer to choose features on the web and custom fit the product to meet his unique and specific needs and by the push of a button actually start the assembly process that ends with a huge payoff - the computer he wants in just two or three days, think about that. We've got to think of creative ways to reengineer the information delivery chain.

Think about the internet. It has captured the imagination of so many, and the world wide web, that has forever altered what we do in so many ways. Just last Monday I heard the CEO of Dialog, Dan Wagner say, that Dialog is 50 times the size of the internet. Did you know that? 50 times the size of the internet. An incredible figure, but who cares? Who cares, if you cannot access Dialog as easily and as quickly and as readily as you can the internet? And as cheaply. That is right. But then the providers, who have been trying to provide information directly to our customers, have found that it is not so easy as it at first appears. They found that the more information they provided, the more complex the problems became. They needed to organize it for access and retrieval. Aha, we said, they need us. At least they need a cataloguer. But then they took our skills and coined the more sophisticated and sexy word and called it meta data. That sounds more exciting that cataloguing. We simply called it descriptive cataloguing. By-passed again. To name it is to own it.

And then there is this vocabulary that we call by the sassy names thesaurus or thesauri or we talk about authority control. And I wonder what they will call it. You see, for the most part, we have sat passively by as witnesses to the action, accessories to the crime and as reactionaries, while imperceptibly but inexorably we have ceded professional territory, bit by bit. Yesterday, meta data, today thesaurus, tomorrow what? We have watched them create a new game, with new rules and then wondered why don't they let us play?

There is no doubt about it, technology seduces. It seduces even us. So much so, that we often turn to it as the answer when it is itself the question. It is easier for management to expend resources on technology rather than on content, because there is something reassuring about its tangibility its bulk that makes it easy to justify the decision making process. On the other hand, we tend to be associated with old technology, PRINT.

Then think about the demystifying of our jobs. You know, all professions like to maintain some mystery, some information that is hidden from the uninitiated and for us it was the searching of the online databases. The arcane search protocols of the online databases, like Dialog. On the internet, any one is able to search and retrieve. No special skills are needed. This has led many to believe that anything and everything they need is available on the net and that it is available for free. The result is that we are faced as a profession with the issue of an identity crisis \endash who are we? And why are we here? And how long are we going to be here? I am here to tell you, that it would never be the same again; And you know, that is not such a bad thing. We always stand ready to doubt ourselves. We glorify the past and so we wonder if our glory days are over. The truth is that our glory days may still be ahead of us.

I would like to suggest some things, some actions, but more, some changes in attitude, some ways of thinking about the things around us and the circumstances around us, that hopefully will indeed bring glory days to us.

The first thing I want to talk about is the creating of a shared vision. Someone has said "there is no freeway to the future, no paved highway from here to tomorrow. There is only wilderness. Uncertain terrain. There are no roadmaps. No signposts. So pioneering leaders rely on a compass and a dream." A

dream, that is what a vision is. Yesterday, I was met at the airport by Ian and I later found out from Ria, that he is her son. We were chatting and he was telling me that he has this dream of visiting the United States and we began to talk about places that he would like to visit, and one of the places he wants to visit is Disney World. How many of you have visited Disney World? Quite a number of you. How many of you have a dream to visit Disney World? I have not visited Disney World, and it's not my dream. Think about Disney World. The story is told that at the opening of Disney World all the high mucky mucks or the executives, the top people, were there talking chatting. Somebody said to the president of Disney company, You know it is a pity that Walt Disney isn't here. It is a pity that he did not live to see this. And the guy looked at him and said but he did see it. This is why it's here! And that is what a vision is all about. Your ability to see what your library is going to be like tomorrow. That is the only way that it is going to exist tomorrow. You see, when people start talking about strategic thinking and strategic planning it is not about forecasting the future, it is not about planning what you will do tomorrow, it is about the futurity of today's decisions. You can't get there from here you can only get here from there.

So a dream is simply a picture in your mind's eye. A mental image of what your library will be like. We are told that everything is created twice, first in the mind and then in reality.

The qualities of a vision must be that it is lofty so that it inspires and it captures your imagination. It needs to be compelling and it needs to be seductive. The vision becomes the lens through which we see and it effects what we see. It helps to shape the decisions we make \endash the opportunities we grasp and exploit. It becomes the primary criterion for making decisions. I remember some years ago when we had the vision for a virtual library this was about 1991 and we started the library as a project. And two years later in December of 1993 I was first introduced to Mosaic immediately I saw Mosaic I knew exactly how the vision was going to come true. Having that vision there provided a lens through which I could see Mosaic, so that Mosaic was no longer just a simple fancy tool, it was a tool that was going to get me where it is I wanted to go. You see, things do not just happen. We make them happen by what we do or what we fail to do. The vision is an evolving dynamic vision because we are creating this vision in an age of turbulence, in an age of uncertainty, in an age of change and in an age of innovation. It is important that as you create this vision you involve your stakeholders and you want not just involvement from them, but you also want commitment. You know the difference between involvement and commitment, don't you? You know the story about the pig and the chicken? They both overheard somebody talking about bacon and eggs. And the hen clucked but the pig looked very sad. And the hen said to the pig, why are you sad? And the pig said, "look, you're only involved. I am committed."

Dr. Arlene Blum has led 15 expeditions to Anapurnia, the tenth highest mountain in the world. What is unusual about this woman is that she led these expeditions with women only. She talked about the first time she tried to lead this expedition nobody believed it could be done. She had a hard time raising the money to do it. The women themselves were not sure that they could do it. But this is what she found out. She said, "I learned that a group of ordinary people when they share a vision can take on a incredible challenge and do things they never dreamed possible." This morning we spoke about challenges, and we think we are ordinary people but we are capable of doing incredible things once we have a vision.

Values

Now we are in the value delivery business or let us put it this way, you should be delivering value. We should be asking ourselves; How do we add value in a way that nobody else does or could? Value is in the eye of the customer or economic buyer. The customer decides whether we are adding value or not. Value may mean different things to different people, and different segments of our customers. We talk about price/value, ratio. This is what allows some products to be sold at a price that is higher than the competitive products and still do it successfully. The price/value ratio and don't fool ourselves to thinking that we offer anything for free. You may not charge a dollar price but somebody is paying something \endash maybe their time or something else. You can ask yourselves how can I add value to my web page that will make people want to go there first rather than to the Internet? Is it because of reliability? Is it because I have selected and customized it? Is it because it is interactive? Is it because I offer a chat room where people can meet people of similar interest? Is it because it is easy to navigate? Is

it because I have anticipated people's needs before they even recognized it themselves? Is it because my web page delivers over and over again! How can I add value? People will pay for value \endash not just content \endash but the value they place on the content.

Shared Values

The other point is Shared values, and I am thinking of value in a different sense now. If we think that we undergoing a crisis of confidence, just think about the people who work for us - the people who report to us. It's even worse for them. It is important then that we understand what our competencies are. What is it that we bring to the table that is unique in its contribution? Unique in its perspective. And as we understand this we share a sense of what our values are. What we value as an organization and we should articulate it with consistency and we should act it out with congruency. We have to make sure that these values cascade down the organization. We need to truly create an environment that empowers our staff to take risks. We need to create a climate where it is safe to take risks. Risks without danger. We need to get people engaged. We need to get people passionate about what they do. The law of thermodynamic, says that we need energy to move inertia and that energy needs to come from within and that energy is passion. There is a coach, a baseball coach I think it was, in the U.S. who said about his team, that he wanted his people fired with enthusiasm or they will be fired with enthusiasm.

Forge strategic alliances

We need to forge these alliances with our vendors and suppliers. You know it is easy to consider them the enemy but that is pointless. Although, I must admit that they do make themselves an easy target. We need to forge strategic alliances with our stakeholders, faculty members, chancellors, and deans. We need to forge strategic alliances with external organizations. You are looking for a win/win. This morning, one of the speakers spoke about GAELIC that is an alliance of University partners of sorts. Creating and managing alliances is an unnatural act. It does not come easily. Essential to its success are trust, credibility and commitment. We can transform our capabilities through alliances. Extend our reach through alliances. We can do things together that we are incapable of doing singly. Let us forge strategic alliances.

Make Burgers With Our Sacred Cows

Robert Kriegel wrote a book titled "Sacred cows make the best burgers." This is also the same guy who wrote the book "If it ain't broke break it." We have to reach the place where we realize that with limited resources we have a need to reallocate these resources to make sure that we are getting the best buck for our money the best value for our buck. We have to make sure that we reallocate those resources to places where we can get the most value, so we need to add new words to our vocabulary words such like; planned obsolescence, words such like; cannibalization. You cannibalize the very services or products that you created. We have to forget those things that we have always done no matter how much we enjoyed doing them. We will find value not from the things that we give up; we will find value from the things that we take up. Now this is not easy, particularly for those who work for us, but we have got to challenge every assumption. Challenge your existing portfolio. Put every product, every service to the test. Consider markets that you never considered before. Nothing is sacred. We have to do some different things and we have to do some things differently. Sacred cows - make the best burgers.

Respond with Flexibility

We have to respond with flexibility. In an age of speed, and in an age of uncertainty the only valuable response is Flexibility. All our organizations need to be supple, ready to respond to change. We need quick reflexes. We need to be very sensitive, very responsive to our environment. We need to be open to new ways of thinking. The operative word is the word new. The world is changing. There is absolutely no way that yesterday's answers could suffice, for today's questions or tomorrow's questions. Maxim Gorky said, "that in the carriages of the past you can not go anywhere. We need to rethink, redefine, reconceptualize what it is we are all about. And this rethinking, this redefinition, this reconceptualization must be ongoing. It must be dynamic. And it must be continuous. Discontinuous change calls for

discontinuous or upside down thinking. Progress, says George Bernard Shaw is made by the unreasonable man. We have to begin to think unreasonably. I wrote down some thoughts about things you can do that are discontinuous. Why not keep our libraries open twenty-four-by-seven? Why not? And you say, well with a virtual library it is open twenty-four-by-seven and I respond, well not really. Information is available twenty four by seven but if we say that we are the critical factors in the library, not just the information needs to be available. Why aren't we available twenty four by seven? And you can do it from home. You don't have to be in the library and the technology supports it. When people are stumped searching the internet or searching your web page then they can press a button that says call the librarian. The face shows up and you answer the problem. Why don't we offer consulting services outside the library? Now to none of these questions should you say we can't do it.

Consulting services even outside the library, outside our campuses using our core competencies. Why can't we create new and exciting information products that are sold in the market place? Why don't we hold patents for search engines? For filters? If somebody is going to do it and someone is, why not us? Other departments in the university have people who have patents isn't that so? And they consult outside don't they? Why can't we out out yahoo, yahoo? We know our customers. We don't want to offer just any alternative, but a packaged customized service product.

Let's rethink our physical structures. I think the library, as a place is a metaphor that still has some viability, so why can't we have internet cafes for students? Why can't we have physical chat rooms, with fireplaces? Why can't we simply restructure our physical structures to suit our changing paradigm?

In this new and different world we need to make bold decisions, and we need to do this on the \par basis of less analysis and less information than we have grown accustomed to or feel \par comfortable with. But that is the new and different world. If every time, I figure out where it's at, somebody moves it! How do I survive? How do you survive? How do we survive? What is the key? What is the answer? The answer is this, and please listen carefully, the answer is simply this, I have got to be the somebody who moves it. You have got to be the somebody who moves it. Instead of figuring out where it's at, you are now deciding where it's at. You may do that through your compelling visions and through your exciting value propositions, through your creative alliances and networks, through recognition of your core competencies, through responding with flexibility, through challenging your assumptions, through your openness to new ways of thinking but make no doubt about it that is the only answer to the challenge of relevance. When you determine the game and the name of the game. When you set the rules of the competition; when you create change rather than react to change; the challenge of relevance becomes a moot issue. It simply becomes irrelevant. The question and challenge was yours. You posed it, the answer lies with you. This is your moment. This is your time. This is your moment, Act now. Thank you.

Thank you.